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C O N F I D E N T I A L BAGHDAD 004978

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TAGS: [KDEM](#) [KISL](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PINS](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: SADRISTS, INCLUDING THEIR MILITIA, ON PARADE

REF: BAGHDAD 4912

Classified By: CLASSIFIED BY POLITICAL COUNSELOR ROBERT S. FORD FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

1. (SBU) SUMMARY: On December 7 as many as 5,000 supporters of Muqtada al Sadr, including many armed members of the Mahdi Army, gathered at Al Mustanseryah Square in Baghdad to mark the seventh anniversary of the death of Mohammed Sadiq Sadr, Muqtada's father (who was killed by Saddam). Among the attendees was Deputy Prime Minister Ahmed al-Chalabi who made a pitch for Sadrist political support. The Sadrists were able to organize and carry out this demonstration without official permission. While demonstrations to mark the anniversary of the death of Muqtada al-Sadr's father have occurred in the capital before, this is the first time they have been held outside of Sadr City. END SUMMARY.

The Demonstration According To the Sadrists

2. (C) In a December 11 meeting, Nasser al-Sadi, a Sadrist Transitional National Assembly (TNA) member from Sadr City, told PolOff that Muqtada al Sadr ordered that the demonstration be peaceful. This was not meant to be a show of force, he claimed. Members of Jaysh al Mahdi (JAM) were present and armed simply to provide security for the march because, according to Nasser, Iraqi Police (IP) and Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) are incapable of doing the job. Nasser assured PolOff that Muqtada al Sadr has decided to eschew violence but will resist the occupation of Iraq through political means.

3. (U) To further demonstrate this newfound love of politics, the Sadrists invited Deputy Prime Minister Ahmed al-Chalabi. Chalabi told the crowd that, "the leadership and efforts of Mohammad Sadiq al-Sadr helped to topple the former regime" and that he (Chalabi) was present to participate in the event with his Sadrist brothers (reftel).

And According To Others

4. (C) In a December 11 meeting, Sadr City DAC chair Hassan Shama and Sadr City DAC member Mohammad Hussein told PolOff that many non-Sadrists in the Sadr City area felt intimidated by the display of armed JAM members in the streets. The fact that JAM closed off streets and redirected traffic without any legal permit to do so underscores the weakness and complicity of IP and ISF, they observed. This show of strength is further proof that JAM controls the streets of Sadr City, according to Hassan Shama.

5. (C) In a December 10 phone interview with PolFSN, Sadr City DAC member Dr. Mustafa Jasim said of the demonstration that the Sadrists wanted to flex their muscles before the December 15 elections. This is why the demonstration culminated in a rally held for the first time outside of Sadr City. Al-Mustanseryah Square features four pictures of Mohammad Baqir al Hakim, the slain brother of Abdul Aziz al Hakim. Dr. Jasim felt that this was to be a display of unity for UIC 555.

6. (C) COMMENT: The fact that the Mahdi Army could hold a large demonstration, and have its members close off streets in areas of Baghdad outside of Sadr City, is evidence of the government's unwillingness to confront the Sadr movement and its militia. Our western journalist contacts have told us for weeks that the Mahdi Army has checkpoints outside Sadr City where they perform occasional car searches. The demonstration also demonstrates how Muqtada plays off his father's reputation to advance his own political prospects. Given the reverence of many Shia for the martyred Sadr family, the authorities may have been reluctant to tangle with such a crowd on such an occasion. END COMMENT.

KHALILZAD